

Provincial Outreach Program for the Early Years  
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## Building Strong Literacy Foundations

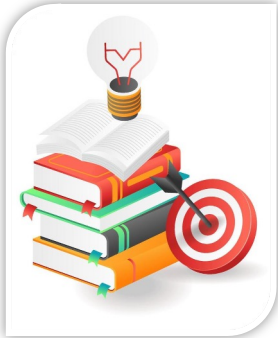
*Session 1 - Uniting the Reading Brain with Essential Skills*

Presenters:  
 Calico Clark and Marianne Vande Pol

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## Learning Objectives



- Understand how the brain learns to read
- Explore foundational skills: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.
- Gain practical tools to enhance literacy instruction


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## Why Literacy Matters

**The right to equal education includes the right to read**

On November 9, 2012, the Supreme Court of Canada released a unanimous decision recognizing that learning to read is not a privilege, but a basic and essential human right.



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## Why Literacy Matters in BC Schools



**What is Literacy?**

- Literacy is more than just reading and writing; it includes critical thinking, communication, and the ability to interpret and create meaningful information in various formats.

**Importance of Literacy**

- Foundation for lifelong learning and success.
- Essential for academic achievement, employability, and active participation in society.
- Builds confidence and fosters personal growth.

**Impact on BC Communities**

- Improved literacy rates contribute to healthier, more informed, and economically stable communities.


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## De-mystifying the Science of Reading

The Science of Reading Is **NOT**:

- An ideology or philosophy
- A fad, trend new idea or pendulum swing
- A political agenda
- A one-size-fits-all approach
- A program of instruction
- A single, specific component of instruction such as phonics




Science of Reading Reframe Guide www.popey.ca @popeybc @POPEYBC POPEY

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## Science of LEARNING

The Science of Reading **IS**:



- A vast, interdisciplinary body of scientifically-based research about reading and issues related to reading and writing.
- Based on research that has been conducted over the last five decades across the world, and it is derived from thousands of studies in multiple languages.
- An abundance of evidence to inform:
  - how proficient reading and writing develop;
  - why some have difficulty; and
  - how we can most effectively assess and teach ...
 therefore, how to improve student outcomes through **prevention** of and **intervention** for reading difficulties.

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### Structured Literacy: Meeting the Needs of All Learners

**Structured literacy:**

- an evidence-based instructional approach
- comprehensive – addressing listening, speaking, reading, and writing
- characterized by what content is taught and how content is taught

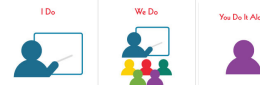


A comprehensive approach that meets the needs of all learners

### Structured Literacy: an approach that meets the needs to all learners

**WHAT is taught:** • Both foundational skills & Higher-level literacy skills

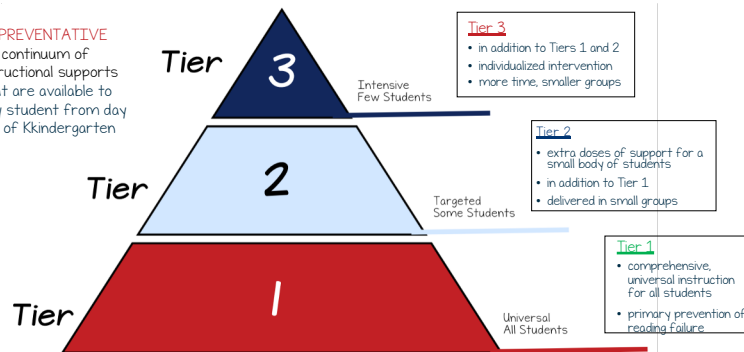
**HOW it is taught:**



- Systematic and Cumulative: simple to complex/follows a scope and sequence
- Explicit
  - Direct instruction
  - “Today we are learning to..”
- Continuous student-teacher interaction
- Not assuming all students can infer concepts
- Careful and considered practice
- Prompt and specific feedback (corrective if needed)

### MTSS - Multi-Tiered System of Supports

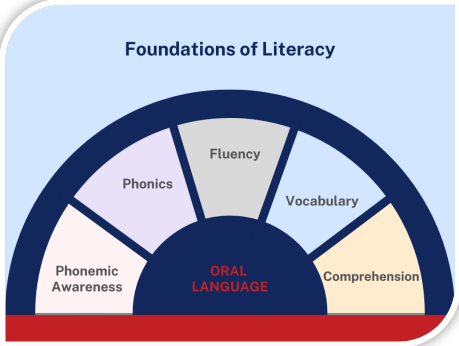
A PREVENTATIVE continuum of instructional supports that are available to every student from day one of Kindergarten



### Notes

Blank lined area for taking notes.

## Foundational Skills for Reading



The diagram is a semi-circle divided into five segments: Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension. At the center of the semi-circle is a dark blue circle labeled 'ORAL LANGUAGE'.


Proficiency in these foundational skills is necessary to all students to be reflective, critical and independent readers

National Reading Panel, 2000

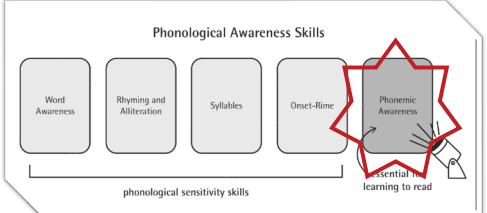
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## Phoneme Awareness



Is the awareness that words are made up of individual sounds



The flowchart shows a sequence of skills: Word Awareness, Rhyming and Alliteration, Syllables, Onset-Rime, and Phonemic Awareness. A bracket under the first four skills is labeled 'phonological sensitivity skills'. An arrow points from the 'Phonemic Awareness' box to a star labeled 'essential to learning to read'.

\* Can be taught without students first mastering phonological sensitivity skills (rhyme, segmenting syllables) \*

Reach All Readers - Geiger, 2024


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## Reminder

**\*Phonemic awareness is the most potent predictor of success in learning to read\***

It is more highly related to reading than tests of general intelligence, reading readiness, and listening comprehension."



Stonovich, 1986, 1994

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**Next STEPS in Literacy Instruction**  
 Connecting Assessments to Effective Interventions  
 Susan M. Smartt  
 Deborah R. Glaser

Includes guidance on using screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring assessments

“Teaching phonemes along with letter names and letter formation supports students’ development of phoneme awareness.”

This combined instruction is more effective than teaching awareness solely through segmenting and blending auditorily.” (p. 55)

Smartt & Glaser, 2023

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**Guiding Principles - How?**

- Explicit, systematic, nothing to chance/discover
- Multiple opportunities throughout day – sprinkling
- Model & support
- Abundance of practice
- Brief (max 20 hours per year, or less than 30 minutes/week) (Tied to PHONICS)

**7 MIGHTY MOVES**  
 Research-Backed, Classroom-Tested Strategies to Ensure K-to-3 Reading Success  
 LINDSAY KEMENY  
 Foreword by Anita L. Archer  
 SCHOLASTIC

7 Mighty Moves – Kemeny, 2023

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**Ideas for Instructional Strategies:**

**Use manipulatives to keep it playful**

- Elkonin boxes + bingo chips
- Pop It fidget toys
- Race cars + tracks
- Unifix cubes

**Encourage gestures**

- Hand choppers
- Tap down arm
- Finger/thumb tap

**Word Chains** – build phonemic awareness and phonics skills at the same time

Phonological Awareness Playbook  
 Using Hand Signals to Teach Short Vowel Sounds

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**Notes**

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## Reminder...



Erhi et al. suggest that "phonemic awareness is not taught for its own sake but rather for its value in helping children understand and use the alphabetic system to read and write".


Further, that it ought not to be taught **"blindly in isolation ad nauseam without any connection to reading and writing"** (2001).

Erhi et al., 2001

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## Sources of Insight

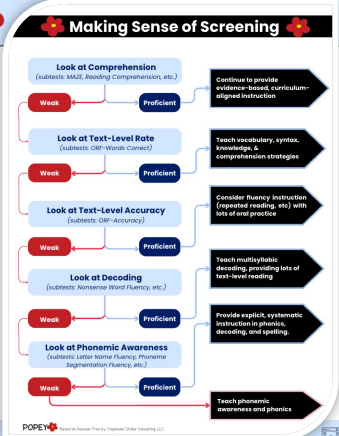


- **Screening:**
  - Phoneme Segmentation Fluency (PSF) - Kindergarten to early 1st grade
    - Measures a student's ability to break a spoken word into its individual phonemes.
  - First Sound Fluency (FSF) - Beginning of Kindergarten
    - Measures a student's ability to isolate and pronounce the first sound in a spoken word.
- **Spelling samples** also provide insight into how well students are segmenting phonemes in words

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## Making Sense of Screening



A weakness in the area of phoneme awareness may exist for older struggling readers, and needs to be addressed.

POPEY Research Center, Inc. by Barbara Baker Consulting, LLC

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## Readiness Skills

The two best predictors of early reading success are phonemic awareness and a student's understanding of the alphabetic principle.



### Alphabetic Principle

The understanding that there are systematic and predictable relationships between sounds and letters.

\*these skills open the gate for reading.\* – Wiley Blevins

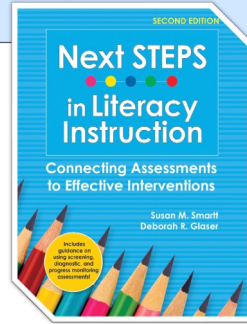
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## Phonics

“Phonics is the **linchpin**, embracing elements of print to represent oral language within a highly dependable, systematic structure.”

– Smartt & Glaser, 2023, p. 83



Phonics refers to knowledge of letter sounds and the ability to apply that knowledge in decoding unfamiliar printed words.

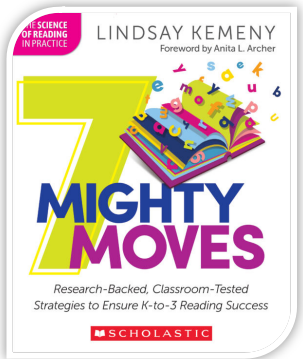
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## Phonics: Instruction

**Keep in mind:**

- Systematic: Move from simple to complex
  - \*\*\* Following a scope and sequence
- Explicit: “Today I want to teach you...”
- Keep students engaged by:
  - Inviting student responses
  - Have students come to the board to find a word, highlight a phonics skill in a word



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**Phonics Instruction**

**HEAR IT**  
• phonemic awareness

**TEACH IT**  
• name and teach new skill/sound

**DECODE IT**  
• decode words with target skill

**ENCODE IT**  
• spell words with target skill

**READ IT**  
• read words, sentences and decodable passages

The last two steps should be approximately 50% of your lesson time. Blevins states "students progress at a much faster rate in phonics when the bulk of instructional time is spent on applying the skill to authentic reading and writing experiences" (2017).

A Fresh Look at Phonics – Blevins, 2016

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**Ideas for Instructional Strategies:**

- Understand "the code" yourself
- Consider using a Systematic and Explicit phonics program
- White boards will be your best friend!
- Keep lessons lively (Perky Pace), and stick to suggested times
- Don't forget to unpack word meaning
- Try multi sensory methods
- Use Elkonin (sound) boxes to support encoding

Elkonin Box Demonstration

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**Sources of Insight**

- **Screening:**  
**Letter Naming Fluency (LNF) – Kindergarten & 1st Grade**  
 > Though not a direct phonics skill, it is a strong predictor of early reading success.
- Nonsense Word Fluency (NWF) – Mid-K to 2nd Grade**  
 > Assesses knowledge of letter-sound correspondences and blending skills.  
 Two scoring types:  
**Correct Letter Sounds (CLS) and Whole Words Read (WWR)**
- Word Reading Fluency (WRF) – 1st to 3rd Grade**  
 > Measures a student's ability to read real words accurately and fluently within one minute.  
 > Assesses automaticity in recognizing common phonics patterns.
- **Word mapping** reveals a child's phonics skills by assessing their ability to segment sounds, match them to letters, blend them into words, and spell accurately.

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### Making Sense of Screening

<p><b>Look at Comprehension</b> (subjects: MAZE, Reading Comprehension, etc.)</p> <p>Weak → Proficient</p>	Continue to provide evidence-based, curriculum-aligned instruction
<p><b>Look at Text-Level Rate</b> (subjects: ORF-Words Correct)</p> <p>Weak → Proficient</p>	Teach vocabulary, syntax, morphology, and comprehension strategies
<p><b>Look at Text-Level Accuracy</b> (subjects: ORF-Accuracy)</p> <p>Weak → Proficient</p>	Consider fluency instruction (repeated reading, etc.) with lots of oral practice
<p><b>Look at Decoding</b> (subjects: Nonsense Word Fluency, etc.)</p> <p>Weak → Proficient</p>	Teach multi-syllabic decoding, providing lots of text-level reading
<p><b>Look at Phonemic Awareness</b> (subjects: Letter Name Fluency, Phoneme Segmentation Fluency, etc.)</p> <p>Weak → Proficient</p>	Provide explicit, systematic instruction in phonics, decoding, and spelling
<p><b>Look at Phonics</b></p> <p>Weak → Proficient</p>	Teach phonemic awareness and phonics

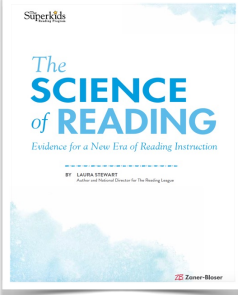
A weakness in the area of phonics may exist for older struggling readers, and needs to be addressed.

POPEY Evidence-Based Literacy Tools for Children Older than Kindergarten

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### Word, Sentence or Phrase...



- Read the article **on your own** (15 minutes)
- Find a partner and discuss your **reflections, connections, and wonderings** in pairs of 2 (5 minutes)
- Join another pair to **make a quadrant** and share your **biggest takeaways** from the article (5 minutes)

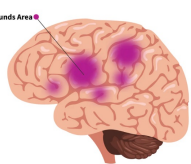
As you read - Highlight a sentence, phrase, word to share

Evidence for a New Era of Reading Instruction

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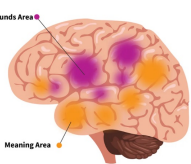
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### How the Brain Learns Spoken Language




**The Sounds Area**

As babies hear a language, their brains track sound patterns and store the most common ones on the left side (Kuhl, 2011, 2015).



**The Meaning Area**

After coding sounds, babies start learning words. Their meanings are stored on the left side of the brain, near the sound area.



**Listening**

As we hear language, the left side of the brain processes sounds and meaning.

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### Skilled Reading



Skilled readers use the same left-brain areas as listening does.

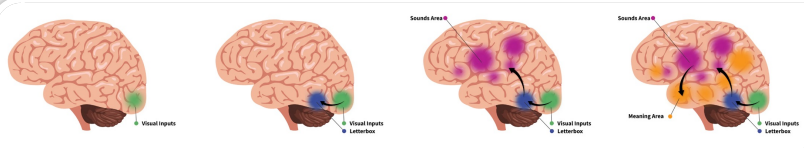
(Dehaene, 2013b)

Science For a New Era of Reading Instruction  
Dehaene, 2010, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c

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### The Reading Brain



Visual Input	Letterbox	Sounds Area	Meaning Area
Reading begins as a visual input.	When the brain sees a letter that represents a sound, the letter box is activated.	Next, the "sounds area" of the brain is activated.	Students then use their auditory mental dictionaries (lexicons) to recognize the meaning of the word, and the "meaning area" of the brain is activated.

Science For a New Era of Reading Instruction  
Dehaene, 2010, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c

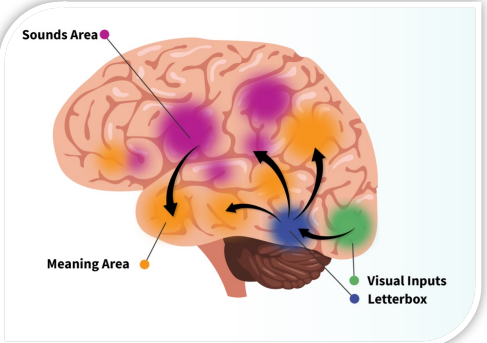
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### Fluent Reading: A Second Pathway Is Formed

With practice sounding out words, the brain develops a second pathway directly from the letterbox to the meaning area.

Fluent readers process sounds and meaning in parallel.



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Dehaene, 2010, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c

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Dehaene, 2010, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c

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## The role of Orthographic Mapping - "Sight Words"

The **process** of storing a word permanently in memory for instant retrieval is called **orthographic mapping**.

We see a **printed word**

h a t

/h/ /æ/ /t/

hat

b e a d

/b/ /e/ /d/

bead

s a i d

/s/ /eɪ/ /d/

said

Automaticity

**hat**: Phonics supports learning the letter-sound knowledge needed.

**bead**: The "ea" pattern in "bead" may be temporarily irregular until this pattern is taught.

**said**: The "ai" pattern in "said" is irregular. Draw children's attention to the parts of the word that is regular.

Our brain uses letter sound relationships PLUS our knowledge of phonemes to segment and blend spoken sounds.

With multiple exposures and practice, our brains map the letter sequence to long-term memory. It becomes a **sight word!**

Creating a sight word involves **forming permanent connections** between a word's letters, its pronunciation, and its meaning in memory.

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## Word Mapping: Supporting the Cognitive Progress

Word mapping is a physical way to represent the relationship between the phonemes and graphemes.

WORD MAPPING

○ ○ ○ ○

d u ck

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Say the word

Tap the word

Map the word

Graph the word

Write the word

Check for meaning

Check for context

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## Decodable Text

Grades 3 and up	LEVELED BOOKS* AND TOPIC LIBRARIES	TRADE BOOK READ-ALOUDS
Grade 2	ACCOUNTABLE DECODABLE TEXT	
Grade 1		
Grade K		

Important to remember that students need access to a variety of texts for different instructional purposes.

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### Scarborough's Reading Rope

SCARBOROUGH'S READING ROPE (2001)

**LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION**

- BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE** (facts, concepts, etc.)
- VOCABULARY** (morphs, precision, links, etc.)
- LANGUAGE STRUCTURE** (syntax, semantics, etc.)
- VERBAL REASONING** (inference, metaphor, etc.)
- LITERACY KNOWLEDGE** (print concepts, genres, etc.)

**WORD RECOGNITION**

- PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS** (syllables, phonemes, etc.)
- DECODING** (alphabetic principle, spelling-sound correspondences)
- SIGHT RECOGNITION** (of familiar words)

THE MANY STRANDS WOVEN INTO SKILLED READING

INCREASINGLY STRATEGIC

INCREASINGLY AUTOMATIC

SKILLED READING

Fluent execution and coordination of word recognition and text comprehension.

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### Why Teach Vocabulary?

- A rich vocabulary supports learning about the world, new ideas, and enjoying the beauty of language
- A rich vocabulary enhances what an individual wants to say and write

Vocabulary knowledge is strongly related to reading proficiency and tightly related to reading comprehension: primary, intermediate, high school and adults.

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### Active Processing Looks and Sounds Like...

Children are more likely to learn when they can actively engage with a word and its meaning, rather than passively receiving information from the teacher

- Discussing images related to a new word
- Discussing and exploring objects ie. a thermometer
- Using movement – demonstrating migration by walking from one side of the room to the other
- Thinking of real-life examples – a time when you felt exuberant
- Discussing multiple meanings of a word – season (your food), season (winter, spring)
- Thinking about/noticing meaningful parts of words (morphology) – tricycle, trianale, tripod
- Using new vocabulary in writing

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### How do we Learn New Words?

When we engage in conversation

What can this look like in the classroom?


- Regularly and intentionally using sophisticated language throughout the day for students of all ages
- The more interesting words we use around students the more words they will pick up and use themselves

A Teacher's Guide to Vocabulary Development Across the Day Wright, 2021  
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### What it Means to Really Know a Word...


- I can share an informal explanation
- I can use a synonym or antonym
- I can give categorical information
- I can recognize nuances between similar words
- I can recognize word parts (morphological understanding)
- I can connect to personal experience
- I can recognize multiple meanings – bark/bark



A Teacher's Guide to Vocabulary Development Across the Day Wright, 2021  
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### Effective Strategies: Frayer Model

<p>What does it Feel like:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. ice cube</li> <li>2. snow</li> <li>3. winter day</li> </ol>	<p>The word in a sentence:</p> <p>Brrr! It is getting <u>cold</u>.</p>
<p><b>c o l d</b></p>	
<p>Write three synonyms:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. freezing</li> <li>2. chilly</li> <li>3. icy</li> </ol>	<p>Draw a picture of the word:</p> 

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### Creating a Word Rich Environment

- Labeling items in the classroom.
- Integrating new vocabulary into daily conversations.
- Encouraging curiosity about words.

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### Read Aloud

There are more rare words found in children's picture books than in the average conversation between two college educated adults.

Hays and Ahrens (1988)

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### Key Takeaways

When you give students the opportunity to acquire a robust vocabulary, you give them the key to unlock the door to comprehension.

Reach all Readers – Anna Geiger, 2024

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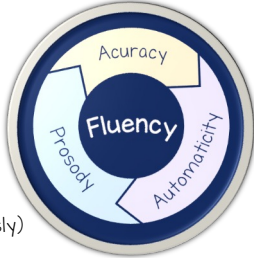
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## Fluency

Fluency refers to the development of three components: **accuracy**, **automaticity** and **prosody** and provides the bridge between word recognition and comprehension (Duke & Cartwright, 2021)

1. **Accuracy** refers to identifying or reading letter names/sounds and words correctly.
2. **Automaticity** can be considered in two levels:
  - **word level** (ability to read words quickly and effortlessly)
  - **text level** (ability to read connected text including sentences, passages and books quickly and effortlessly)
3. **Prosody** refers to a readers natural voice and expression



(Duke & Cartwright, 2021)    www.popey.ca    @popeybc    @POPEYBC    POPEY

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## Building Fluency

**Accuracy:** we can build accuracy through decoding as part of explicit and systematic phonics instruction.

**Automaticity:** reading words with automaticity is a result of orthographic mapping (Ehri, 2014).

We can build **word level automaticity** through blending drills and Beat the Clock and other word reading activities including word mapping.

**Text level automaticity** is achieved through reading practice of connected text. Such practice can include repeated reading, choral reading and echo reading.

**Prosody** is built through teacher modeling of fluent reading during read alouds and can also develop through repeated reading and activities like readers theatre

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## Ideas for instructional Strategies:

- Remember...fluency is not an isolated skill
  - subskills: phonemic awareness, sound-symbol knowledge, automaticity at letter or word level
- Small Group instruction affords specific, immediate feedback
- Model, model, model!!!
- Whole Group Reading including:
  - Read aloud, cloze reading, choral reading, echo reading
- Partner Reading
- Reader's Theatre
- Beat the Clock Timed Reading
- Repeated Reading - Fluency Triangles

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## Notes

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## Sources of Insight

All Universal Screeners include fluency measures!

- ✦ Bridges Decoding & Comprehension - Frees mental energy for understanding.
- ✦ Signals Foundational Skill Gaps - Reveals phonics or vocabulary weaknesses.
- ✦ Predicts Future Reading Success - Strong fluency links to academic growth.
- ✦ Quick & Reliable - One-minute tests provide fast, accurate data.
- ✦ Guides Instruction - Helps target accuracy, speed, and expression.



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## The Simple View of Reading - Comprehension

D X LC = RC

Decoding Linguistic Comprehension Reading Comprehension

Image Credit: IFLI Foundations Manual

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## Skilled Comprehenders use these Strategies

### The 6 Most Important Comprehension Strategies

- 01 Switch on What You Know
- 02 Map the Text
- 03 Keep a Close Eye on Comprehension
- 04 Dig Below the Surface
- 05 Fill in the Missing Pieces
- 06 Sum Up What You Know

We can explicitly model these comprehension skills and engage students in conversations that allow them to practice comprehension.

TheSixShifts.com

Six Shifts: Are You Teaching the Key Comprehension Strategies Students Really Need. www.popey.ca @popeybc @POPEYBC POPEY

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## Reading Comprehension

"There is no comprehension strategy powerful enough to compensate for the fact that you can't read the words" (Archer, 2001)



- Reading comprehension is complex and is **not a single "skill" or set of strategies**
- Instead, we can think of it as an **outcome**

Archer, 2001 | www.popey.ca | @popeybc | @POPEYBC | POPEY

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## An Invitation

What is one thing you might:


- Start
- Stop
- Keep



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## THE Reading Tree



"We envision learning to read is like growing a tree. The decoding skills of phonemic awareness and systematic phonics are akin to the roots supporting the part of the tree we see, comprehension and the joy of reading."

Leach et al. Frith, 2002 | www.popey.ca | @popeybc | @POPEYBC | POPEY

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